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family connections

Summer 2005 Issue

What's In a Name?

It is the mission of every staff member at the Department of Children's Services and other agencies that serve children in state custody to ensure a safe, secure, permanent family connection for every child. **FAMILY CONNECTIONS** are what keep us alive, and what make us human. From our first breath, it is the vital connection to someone who loves and is committed to us that allow us to move forward in growth, development, and eventually builds the capacity to love and give.

For children touched by the child welfare system, that family connection has been strained, or even broken. From our first contact with the child, we seek to restore a safe and permanent family connection with birth families, relatives, members of the child's network, and caring resource families.

The key to maintaining and building **FAMILY CONNECTIONS** is the resource family. Resource families understand that a child can never be loved by too many people, and embrace the child's need to maintain vital relationships with caring birth family members and friends. Resource parents also know that every child needs a life-long permanent family, and are prepared to consider making the child a part of their family by adoption, should that become the permanency plan for the child.

The newly focused **FAMILY CONNECTIONS** Newsletter is written for all resource families, and for everyone who supports children in state care to grow up within the context of a safe, loving permanent family connection.

FAMILIES FOR PROMISE

REFLECTIONS OF A RESOURCE PARENT

BY MARCEE WHITE



Promise, age 2, has a permanent adoptive family that will provide her with a lifetime of nurturing, belonging, and commitment. Promise also has a birth family who loves her and gave her many of the endearing qualities she is developing with each passing day. How do Promise's families "connect" to ensure that her needs for identity, support, and caring will always be met? The answer may be found in the new concept of "resource parenting", a concept that expands our understanding of the significant roles that foster and adoptive parents can play in the lives of the children they care for.

What is a resource family? What do they do? What roles do they play? A resource family can be relatives or non-relatives that are able to embrace the idea that children's needs come first. Resource families can move through a variety of roles over time and are committed to helping a child achieve permanency. Their roles may include reunifying children with their family of origin, committing to becoming a permanent parent by adoption, or connecting with the child as a lifelong extended family member. Ultimately, they value the benefits of supporting the connections between children and birth families regardless of the permanency outcome. Let's travel the road of transition with a young lady as she shares her experiences as a respite provider, a resource parent and finally an adoptive mom.

Jennifer, age 30, began fostering at the age of 24. Coming from a very supportive and loving family, she states that she has always felt a deep concern for the needs of others. Connecting with her lifelong partner, Scott, who shares her passion, Jennifer and her husband have committed their lives to helping and assisting others. Initially, Jennifer's intentions were not to be a foster parent. The journey began for her and her family quite unexpectedly. Due to a family connection with the birth mother of the beautiful little lady they ultimately adopted, Jennifer stepped in to provide support for the family. The birth mother, who we'll call "Lisa," was in foster care at the time, and had given birth to a little boy, Dee. Dee was placed in the foster home of Jennifer's friend. The friend later took Lisa in so that she could have a connection to Dee. Jennifer and her husband at that time agreed to provide respite services for him. A few years later, Lisa gave birth to yet another child, Promise. She requested that Jennifer and Scott take her in and raise her. Due to the strong bond and family connection, they of course agreed. Although Promise was ultimately adopted by Jennifer and Scott, she continues to have contact with Lisa, and visits with Dee at least weekly.

Although this sounds like a storybook ending, the process did present its challenges.

In light of the fact that Jennifer and Scott are Caucasian and Promise is African-American, the first obvious challenge resulted from the insensitive reactions of others. Jennifer shared several encounters she experienced in the friendly neighborhood Wal-Mart, where those who are less diverse and less aware made inappropriate comments, gestures or snide or unkind remarks. This presented a challenge personally for Jennifer because she had to develop ways to not be offended by the insensitivity of others. Ongoing contact with the birth family is one way that Jennifer helps Promise retain her racial identity. She has made a conscious effort to explain to Promise the difference in her role and that of her birth mom. **In her own words, Jennifer explains that a mommy is one who takes care of you by feeding you and keeping you nice and clean, every day. A birth mom actually gives you the characteristics that shape your appearance. A child gets their eyes, hair and often their personality from their birth parents.** Although contact with the birth family is not frequent, Jennifer would be

comfortable and open to even more. Although initially Promise's father tried hard to obtain custody of his daughter, he was not in the position to provide for her, and ultimately came to the place of acceptance. He was happy that his daughter was receiving the love and attention she so richly deserved. Fortunately, he does communicate with her via phone at least once a month. This too allows the maintenance of Promise's heritage to continue. **Even now that the adoption is final, Jennifer makes every effort to keep in contact with family and friends of Promise regarding her progress. This makes for a tight family unit for Promise to flourish.**

While Promise's goal was adoption, other children travel another road to permanency. Jennifer and Scott were involved in assisting another child throughout the transitional phase of his placement with birth relatives. From the beginning of the placement, the goal of reunification with birth family was clear. With this knowledge, the family was very clear on what their particular role in this child's life would be. When the time arrived for Jacob to return home to his family in California, Jennifer and

Scott took the time to travel with him to his grandparents' home where he would reside. Facing mental challenges, his birth mom was unable to accept full responsibility for him, but was very much a part of his life.

Jennifer and her husband remained in the grandparents' home for five days. Each day, they gradually decreased the amount of time they stayed. The first night they stayed all day until bedtime and assisted in that process. The next day they arrived in the evening and stayed until he fell asleep. The next day they allowed the grandparents to put him to bed themselves while they stayed in a hotel nearby in the event their services were needed. They continue to maintain contact with Jacob and his grandparents at least once every two months.

When asked what advice she would give to resource parents contemplating nurturing children in care, Jennifer simply states, "Be willing to take the risk of being hurt, because the ultimate goal is for them to return home." Embracing the concept of resource parents is often difficult, especially for birth families. Many birth parents feel threatened by the presence of someone else caring for the intimate

"Be willing to take the risk of being hurt, because the ultimate goal is for them to return home".

needs of their child. Jennifer and her family were able to accomplish the task of breaking down barriers by developing and maintaining trust of the birth family. By taking the time to get to know them and to develop an understanding of their individual situations, they were able to gain their confidence. This made the process much easier for all involved. Presently, Jennifer and her husband are fostering two children born to a mother who has mental challenges. The mother makes weekly phone calls to their home and Jennifer makes every effort to involve her in doctor's appointments, physicals, etc. Her willingness to keep the birth mother involved in her children's lives has made the bond stronger for all involved.

Resource parents commit themselves to accomplishing the goal of each child they serve. Removing themselves and their own desires and needs, they focus solely on the interests of the child and the importance of maintaining family connections and safety. Jennifer and her family have made this commitment, and realized the joy and satisfaction of responding to each child's individual needs. This satisfaction can be realized by anyone willing to make the commitment to embark on the journey of resource parenting.

Twenty Five Years of Serving The Children and Families of Tennessee

His stories have captivated viewers every Monday for the past 25 years. Bill Williams, a former news anchor with WBIR-TV (NBC) in Knoxville, has tirelessly worked to provide exposure for the children of Tennessee who are waiting for families to call their own.



Since May of 1980, "Monday's Child" has changed not only the lives of the children who have been aired on the segment, but for potential adoptive families as well.

Over 1,300 stories of children who need permanent homes have

been featured on the weekly news segment during the past 25 years. Bill's goal for starting this feature was to profile children waiting for adoptive families in the hope they might find permanent homes. For many viewers of the feature, it is their first introduction to adoption of children in state care. Many families look forward to the weekly segment that brings the stories of waiting children into their home. Seeing the Monday's Child feature every week helps potential families to understand the needs of children in state care and encourages them to make the call to their Department of Children's Services office to learn more about adoption. It may take families months or years before they make the decision to call and inquire about being a permanent family for a child. Monday's Child has been instrumental in keeping awareness of the topic of adoption of children in the foster care system in the minds of families and encouraging them to get more information about adoption services.

Bill has been a "pioneer" in the field of featuring children who are available for adoption. His dedication to the children is clearly visible in his interviews. He is able to help children he interviews to relax, forget about the television camera, and talk about their need for a permanent family.

Bill has been proactive in getting the weekly Monday's Child features streamlined on WBIR's website, www.wbir.com, then click on the "Monday's Child" link. Whenever you are in Knoxville area on a Monday, be sure to watch Bill Williams on Channel 10 as he features another child who wants a forever home. You might be the family this child has been waiting for....

In addition to Bill Williams' "Monday's Child" feature in the Knoxville and east Tennessee area, other television stations across the state offer "waiting child" features during their local newscasts. If you live in or are traveling throughout Tennessee, please watch for these weekly child features:

Memphis- "Waiting Child" can be seen on Monday and Wednesday on WPTY-TV (ABC) and UPN 30 in Memphis.

Tri Cities- "Thursday's Child" can be seen on Thursday on WJHL-TV (CBS) (Johnson City, Bristol, Kingsport)

Miracles Waiting To Happen



Meet Jody - 9/25/95

Jody likes to play outside and to play his video games. He is on the football team at school and wants to continue playing football.

Jody's case manager says that he is a very lovable child and tries hard to please. His agency worker says that Jody wants very much to be adopted and have a family of his own.

Jody needs nurturing and outgoing parents who will provide him with a stable, loving home.

For more information:

LaToya Anderson
731-658-5141



Meet Aaron - 4/3/89

Aaron enjoys singing in his church choir and has even participated in competitive singing in his church. Aaron does well in school academically. He enjoys watching movies and playing video games. He likes to watch sports on TV, especially basketball.

Aaron's Resource Coordinator states that Aaron is very helpful around his foster parents home, and he even helps out with other neighbors' yard work. Aaron's RC states that Aaron is a very intelligent young man.

For more information:

Anne Williams
865-425-4393, Ext. 321



Meet Chad - 12/19/87

Chad likes playing video games and football. He likes playing every position except quarterback! Chad is an intelligent and creative teenager who occasionally writes poetry. He also enjoys watching science fiction movies. Other interests include

skateboarding, bicycling, playing basketball and being outdoors. He is interested in cars and would like to learn how to repair them.

Those closest to Chad say that he is a wonderful young man. They also say that he has a tendency to daydream and lose focus on his schoolwork. Chad is extremely intelligent and capable of doing college level work.

For more information:

Jessica Timlin
615-253-5991



Meet Shiane 7/30/90

Shiane enjoys singing at church and watching television. She writes poetry to help express her feelings. Shiane gets along well with the other children in her home but does tend to want to be in charge. Shiane is a bright

child but struggles in school. She has aspirations of attending college but has not decided what her choice of study will be.

Shiane's caseworker says that Shiane tries hard not to hurt other people's feelings and that she loves to sing and needs a family who will support her in her dreams and help build her self-confidence and self-esteem.

For more information:

Debbie Copeland
931-646-3103

Help Us Find A Family



Meet Aaron - 4/25/89

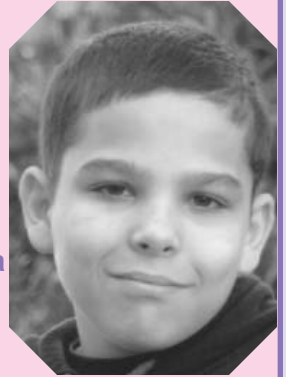
Aaron wants a "family that will do things with me and teach me new stuff." He loves to draw and enjoys all types of outdoor activities. He likes going out to eat, spending time with others, sharing and creating everyday experiences.

Aaron's case manager says that he is a soft spoken young man who enjoys activities with caring adults. He is capable of accomplishing much.

For more information:

Maggie Posey
931-962-1156, Ext. 204

Meet Michael -
12/14/88



Michael enjoys Rap music, especially "Eminem", the Titan's Football Team and likes to go shopping. Pizza and McDonald's are his favorite foods.

Michael's case manager says that he has difficulty connecting with others as he is slow to trust, but he can be quite engaging.

Michael enjoys being around other younger children and he is easily influenced by his peers and older children.

For more information:

Traci McKenzie
423-493-8882

Marcus and Joseph -
6/24/90



Marcus would like a family who goes to church, baseball games, and sometimes watch a movie together. He tends to be the leader and has lots of energy. He absolutely will not eat watermelon or food from Taco Bell.

Joseph is more calm and tries to keep Marcus in line. His favorite color is orange. He likes to play ball in the gym and watch baseball games. He likes to eat anything except for spinach and beets.

For more information:

Michael Warren
423-854-5036

Meet Tambara - 2/19/93



Tambara is a very lovable, tall and attractive young lady. She listens and is very respectful of others. She is an excellent role model and a great student.

She tries very hard to accomplish tasks that are presented to her.

She enjoys bowling and has received several trophies and awards. She has the ability to take charge and to be a good leader, listener and follower. She is very intelligent and eager to be accepted.

For more information:

Tarvis Davis
901-578-4219

Finding Permanency ~ One Child At A Time

Denise Goodman Shares Insights on Child-Specific Recruitment



Denise Goodman, a nationally known trainer and advocate for children in foster care who need permanence, recently concluded a series of trainings in Nashville for recruitment staff throughout the state. These trainings highlighted the need to use "Child-Specific Recruitment" to find permanent families for children.

Child Specific Recruitment focuses on gathering information about a specific child, including his/her needs, desires and the type of family that would be the best family for them. Goodman discussed the steps to create a Child-Specific Recruitment Plan, combining the resources of the child's case record, their birth family and extended family network, former foster parents and their extended network, other friends and potential resources. Any of these persons may be able to offer help to provide permanency for the child.

At the beginning of the process, Goodman said it is critical for workers to complete an "archeological dig" through the child's case record as they initially begin to develop their plan to search for potential resource families. Each page through the child's case record should be reviewed closely and the name of any potential resource family should be documented and investigated to inquire whether this family or any family within their network would be an appropriate resource for the child/siblings. Next, talk with the child about persons they have known or lived with and felt comfortable with in the past to help determine potential resources. If the child is comfortable enough to mention the name of the person from their past, then it would be beneficial for the worker to follow up with the family to find out whether they are interested in being a resource parent for this child. These individuals would be asked to either consider being a resource parent for the child or be a part of the Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) to collaborate to find a permanent home for this child/sibling group. Everyone in the child's network needs to come together to consider families they are aware of who may be a potential resource for this child. The child's case manager or adoption specialist working with the child will follow up to determine interest level and feasibility of the family as a resource.

If an investigation of the child's current and former network of family and friends does not come up with an identified resource family, then a Child-Specific Recruitment Plan needs to be

developed for the child that is based on the child's needs and desires. The Child-Specific Recruitment Plan is customized to recruit the type of families that are willing to meet the needs of the child. This might involve recruiting a family for a child who lives in a specific location or have similar family interests as the child. For example, a child may have always dreamed of living on a farm. The plan that is developed for the child should be specifically geared to attract families who might be able to provide this type of living environment for the child in a rural setting. Individual brochures and other literature will be created to feature this child. These recruitment items will be given to individuals or placed in businesses that may attract families that live on farms or other rural settings. The worker or other people in the child's recruitment team could go out and make brief speaking engagements at community business or civic clubs that can help "snowball" the effort and raise awareness this specific child needs a home. The child is usually involved in the development of this process and their needs and desires can be factored into the recruitment plan. Since the child participates in this process, they are typically more committed to the plan for permanence and are often their own best recruiters.

It is critical for current resource parents to work in partnership with case managers and adoption specialists to provide insight regarding potential resources for the child. The more caring hearts and

resourceful eyes, ears and voices that can be brought to the table to identify potential resources for the child, the more likely it will that a permanent home will be found to embrace the child for the remainder of his life. Even though families may not be able to commit to adopt children, they can be an important link to finding permanence for any child they come in contact with who is in the Tennessee foster care system and looking for a permanent family they can call their own.

PGA Golfer Helps to Find Homes for Tennessee's Waiting Children Through "Tour Fore Adoption"

Kirk Triplett, professional golfer and adoptive parent, is doing his part to raise awareness about adoption. He has created a program, called **Tour Fore Adoption**, along with Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, to promote the need to place America's foster children in permanent loving homes. At each golf tournament he plays in during the year, Mr. Triplett displays a picture of a child or sibling group on his golf bag along with a brief statement about the child and the toll-free number of the Dave Thomas Foundation. In addition, Mr. Triplett's golf caddy passes out adoption information cards to spectators of the tournament who are interested in being resource parents for children. When a potential family calls the toll-free number on the card, they are given the telephone number of the adoption agency that is working with the child to find them a permanent home.

Mr. Triplett was in Memphis the week of May 23-29th, 2005 to compete in the Fed Ex/St. Jude TPC at Southwind. At this tournament,

Mr. Triplett met with Kiara, a thirteen-year old child from Memphis. Mr. Triplett met with media members and talked about the need for adoptive homes for children in foster care. Kiara was given a private tour of the grounds, clubhouse and other private locations at the tournament. Kiara had a great time and was really impressed that her picture was on Mr. Triplett's golf bag. Verlanda Pipkin, Kiara's case manager said, "This is a great recruitment tool and I am thankful my Team Coordinator gave my child a chance to be a part of this grand event". **If you are interested in viewing a picture or profile of Kiara or any other child available for adoption in Tennessee, please go to www.state.tn.us/youth/adoption.**



Kiara

**For More Information Contact:
Verlanda Pipkin
901-578-4239**

SAVE THE DATES

For

“The Family Focus: Our Time, Their Future”

The Tennessee Adoption and Foster Care Association will hold its 2005 state conference on September 30 - October 2 at the Marriott Cool Springs in Franklin, TN. This year's conference theme is “The Family Focus: Our Time, Their Future”. Resource parents, staff, child welfare professionals, and facilitators from around the state will join together for a weekend full of learning, networking, relaxation and fun. Over 50 workshops on a wide variety of topics will be offered, and attendance at the opening session and workshops in each time slot will allow participants to earn the required 15 hours of annual training.

Plan to join in this stimulating and fun-filled event. More information will be forthcoming through mailings, the website, and the next ***FAMILY CONNECTIONS*** newsletter!



Please note that we would love to hear feedback from you at any time. If you have an adoption story or related topic that you would like to submit for publication, please contact Brian Tuverson at 800-807-3228 or via email, brian.tuverson@state.tn.us. If you would like to discontinue receiving the newsletter, please contact Brian Tuverson via email or telephone.

REACT Staff

Brian Tuverson, REACT Coordinator
Paula Pereira, REACT Systems Specialist
Marcee White, Contributing Author
Jan Dick, Contributing Author

www.state.tn.us/youth/adoption

Family & Children's Service
1158 Foster Avenue
Nashville, TN 37243

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